

Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-11

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TO AMEMBASSY DACCA PRIORITY
INFO AMEMBASSY RANGOON
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 119776

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, SREF, BG, BM

SUBJECT:MUSLIMS FLEEING BURMA

1. BANGLADESH EMBASSY MINISTER HUMAYUN KABIR PAID BRIEF
CALL ON NEA/PAB OFFICERS COON AND ARCHARD MAY 9 TO DISCUSS
THE PROBLEM OF MUSLIMS FLEEING FROM BURMA INTO BANGLADESH.
KABIR HANDED OVER A DIPLOMATIC NOTE WITH AN ATTACHED
MEMORANDUM WHICH STRESSED THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION.
(TEXT FOLLOWS). THE MINISTER NOTED HIS CONCERN THAT TALKS
BETWEEN BANGLADESH AND BURMA SEEM TO HAVE STALLED. HIS
GOVERNMENT WOULD "APPRECIATE OUR ADVICE" ON HOW TO PROCEED
FURTHER WITH THE MATTER. KABIR SAID THAT HE FEARED THE
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POSSIBILITY OF REPRISAL BY BANGLADESHIS AGAINST ETHNIC
BURMA ON THE BANGLADESH SIDE OF THE BORDER IF THE SITUATION
SHOULD CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE. COON EXPRESSED OUR
HUMANITARIAN CONCERN FOR THE SUFFERING WHICH THE SITUATION
ENTAILS AND SAID WE HOPED THAT THE TWO GOVERNMENTS COULD
RESOLVE THE PROBLEM BETWEEN THEMSELVES.

2. TEXT OF MEMORANDUM FOLLOWS: BEGIN TEXT:

THE INFLUX OF REFUGEES FROM BURMA INTO BANGLADESH WHICH STARTED IN LATE MARCH HAS SUDDENLY SWELLED INTO CRITICAL PROPORTIONS RESULTING IN UNTOLD HUMAN SUFFERINGS. DURING

LAST FORTNIGHT ABOUT 100,000 BURMESE NATIONS INHABITING WESTERN REGION OF BURMA HAVE BEEN PUSHED INTO THE ADJOINING BANGLADESH TERRITORY. IT IS REPORTED THAT ANOTHER 60,000 PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN UPROOTED UNDER SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES ARE HIDING IN JUNGLE TO AVOID FURTHER ATROCITIES OF BURMESE AUTHORITIES AND ARE SEEKING WAYS OF SLIPPING INTO BANGLADESH FOR SECURITY.

THROUGH A CONCERTED CAMPAIGN OF INTIMIDATION, ARSONING, LOOTING, RAPING AND EVEN PHYSICAL VIOLENCE BY THE BURMESE ARMED FORCES INNOCENT MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN INHABITING WELL WITHIN BURMESE TERRITORY HAVE BEEN THROWN OUT OF THEIR ANCESTRAL HOMES AND FORCED TO SEEK SHELTER IN BANGLADESH. FIFTY DEATHS HAVE ALREADY OCCURED AND A LARGE NUMBER OF ESCAPES BEARING MARKS OF BULLET AND BAYONET INJURIES HAVE BEEN HOSPITALIZED ON BANGLADESH SIDE. BURMESE ARMED FORCES HAVE ALSO BEEN FIRING ACROSS THE BORDER ON REFUGEE CAMPS WHERE THE EVICTEES HAVE BEEN GIVEN TEMPORARY SHELTER.

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ALTHOUGH BURMESE AUTHORITIES HAVE TERMED THIS PROBLEM AS ONE OF "ILLEGAL ALIEN" IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THESE ARE PEOPLE OF BUDDHIST AND MUSLIM FAITH FROM BRITISH-INDIA WHO ARE SETTLED THERE FOR SEVERAL GENERATIONS PARTICULARLY IN THE AREA OF ARAKAN STATE. UNDER THE POLICY OF DE-MUSLIMINISATION OF ARAKAN BURMESE HAVE ALWAYS TREATED THESE SETTLERS WITH HARSHNESS AND DISCRIMINATION. HISTORY OF INTERMITTENT TENSION AND FORCED MIGRATION CONTINUED FOR NEARLY THREE DECADES. BUT THE PRESENT MAGNITUDE OF INFLUX HAS BROKEN ALL PREVIOUS RECORDS AND HAS NOT ONLY CAUSED SUFFERINGS TO INNOCENT PEOPLE BUT HAS ALSO CREATED UNSTABLE CONDITIONS ON THE BORDER WHICH IS A MATTER OF DEEP CONCERN OF BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT.

BELIEVING IN A POLICY OF BORDER OF PEACE WITH BURMA AND COMPLETE NON-INTERFERENCE IN EACH OTHER'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH HAVE BEEN URGING THE BURMESE AUTHORITIES TO ENSURE THE RETURN OF REFUGEES TO THEIR HOME AND SEEK SOLUTION TO THEIR SUFFERINGS. AS THEY ARE BURMESE NATIONALS IT IS FULLY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THEIR RETURN. ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITY PROBLEMS ARE NOT UNCOMMON BUT EACH COUNTRY SEEKS

SOLUTION TO SUCH PROBLEMS WITH COMPASSION AND OBJECTIVITY.

THE POLICY OF BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT WAS EXPLAINED TO THE HIGHEST LEVEL WHEN BANGLADESH PRESIDENT PAID A VISIT TO RANGOON IN JULY 1977. SIMILARLY DURING THE VISIT OF THE BURMESE FOREIGN MINISTER TO DACCA IN APRIL LAST, BURMESE AUTHORITIES WERE URGED THAT THE CONDITIONS BE CREATED SO

THAT REFUGEES ARE NOT FORCED TO COME INTO BANGLADESH TERRITORY. IT HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY STRESSED THAT SUCH UNSTABLE CONDITION ON THE BORDER RESULTING FROM FORCIBLE EVICTION OF BURMESE NATIONALS NOT ONLY INHIBITS GROWTH OF FRIENDLY AND COOPERATIVE RELATION BETWEEN BANGLADESH AND BURMA BUT ALSO MIGHT ENCOURAGE EXPLOITATION OF THE SITUATION.
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TION BY FORCES UNFRIENDLY TO BOTH BANGLADESH AND BURMA.

THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH WHICH HAVE EXPRESSED GRAVE CONCERN ON THIS MATTER CONTINUES TO REMAIN IN TOUCH WITH THE BURMESE AUTHORITIES SO THAT ARRANGEMENTS COULD BE MADE FOR EARLY RETURN OF THE REFUGEES TO THEIR HOME AND A SENSE OF SECURITY RESTORED TO THEM AS BANGLADESH COULD NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR BURMESE NATIONALS JUST BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN FORCIBLY THROWN INTO BANGLADESH TERRITORY. END TEXT.
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